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van Rappard, J.F.H.

published in

Theory and Psychology
1997

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1177/0959354397071008](https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354397071008)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

van Rappard, J. F. H. (1997). History of psychology turned inside out. *Theory and Psychology*, 7, 101-105.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354397071008>

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Theory Psychology 1997 7: 101

DOI: 10.1177/0959354397071008

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History of Psychology Turned Inside(r) Out: A Comment on Danziger

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ABSTRACT. Danziger (1994) distinguished between the insider-scientist and the outsider-historian models for the history of psychology. The present paper contends that since in psychology history has a contemporary relevance, there is a place for insider history in the discipline; hence, a mixed model is appropriate. Issue is taken with Danziger's view of insider history as inherently celebratory. It is finally argued that it is doubtful if critical history bridges the gap between the two historiographical models.

KEY WORDS: historiography, history of psychology

Recently, Kurt Danziger (1994) published a paper on current trends and issues in the historiography of psychology. The gist of 'Does the History of Psychology Have a Future?' is conveniently summarized in an interview with the author in the newsletter of Cheiron-Europe (Brock, 1995). Asked about history and its place within the discipline, Danziger answers that in his opinion

... the question is connected with the older question whether psychology is more like a natural science or more like a human science. You have two different models of the use of history there. In the natural sciences, by and large, historical studies do not play a contemporary role. ... We can contrast that with the situation in a discipline like economics, for example, where critical consideration and confrontation of past work has often informed current work. (pp. 8-9)

In Danziger's paper, the two models of history of science are pictured more fully. A crucial difference between the science-oriented model and the one that is geared to the social sciences, including economics, is that since in the former history is not considered to have any contemporary significance, history is pursued from a bystander (Rappard, 1990) or outsider point of view. In the social sciences, on the other hand, scientists can fruitfully study the history of their pursuits and, hence, can take an insider's stance when doing so.

In biology and psychology mixed models obtain. In these disciplines, the fields of the past are worked by professional historians of science, of course, but also by scientist-historians. In biology the mix contains a heavier dose of professionals than in psychology, but, Danziger contends, increasingly, professional historians, too, are contributing in this area and the time has come therefore 'to ask whether the model represented by physics or that represented by economics is the appropriate one for psychology' (Danziger, 1994, p. 468; henceforth, page numbers will refer to this

paper unless stated otherwise). In coming to grips with this problem the outsider-historian and the insider-scientist positions are sketched as rather divergent, and although Danziger ends on a conciliatory view on their mutual relation, the latter is described in terms that leave little doubt about the sympathy of the author. In this comment I try to add a little colour to Danziger's bleak picture of insider history and argue that there is a place for it in psychology.

'Departments of physics or chemistry are not in the habit of offering courses in the history of their subjects,' Danziger observes, 'yet the history of psychology continues to be taught in departments of psychology' (p. 467). I was struck to find this observation, which has also been made by the present author (Rappard, 1993, 1995, 1996), in the context of an argument that runs counter to my own view on the role of history in psychology. Danziger applies some tests to obtain this view of the position of the history of psychology within the discipline. How many departments, he wonders, are prepared to accept doctoral theses in this area and how many research journals will publish historical studies? These questions receive negative answers and it is inferred that for most psychologists historical work has no contribution to make to the discipline and that in this respect their position does not differ from that of most contemporary physicists. I take issue with this view. As I see it, there is a fundamental difference—or, rather, a difference at the foundational level—between psychology and the natural sciences, and it is because of this difference, I contend, that most psychologists see no reason to delete history from the curriculum.

Remarkably, Danziger himself provides the grounds for my contention. In contradistinction to the natural sciences, he writes, the human sciences are characterized by the existence of alternative schools whose views on method and subject-matter of the discipline are strongly at odds. Such schools tend to highlight the fundamental differences with alternative schools. Hence, 'for such fields deep historical studies can have considerable *contemporary relevance and hence fall within the boundaries of the field itself*' (pp. 471–472; emphasis added). The present writer couldn't agree more and has actually argued to the same effect on various occasions. This quotation cogently states the grounds for my view that—as different from the natural sciences—there is 'history in psychology' (Rappard, 1993) and that history can therefore be said to fall *within* its boundaries (Rappard, 1995, 1996). Why say that in marked distinction to Galileo and Newton in physics, Weber and Durkheim are still studied in sociology and Adam Smith and Ricardo in economics (p. 472) but remain silent about, for example, Wundt, James and Vygotsky in psychology?

Danziger and I may agree that 'the grounds for claiming a certain priority for history are much stronger in the case of psychology than in the case of the natural sciences' (p. 475), but we do not agree on the model for history of psychology, which is the question at stake. And this brings us to the two models, mentioned earlier.

A fundamental divergence of interests is observed between the professional historian working on psychology, and the psychological scientist who works on the history of her discipline. Elaborating on this divergence, some crucial insights are drawn from Forman's (1991) *Independence, Not Transcendence for the Historian of Science*. Until about 20 years ago, Forman notes, the history of science was subservient to the scientist whose field he worked and whose prestige he was

allowed to share. This division of labour was perfectly natural since in contrast to history, the successful natural sciences,

... which insist that their success as a collective cognitive enterprise entitles them to moral allegiance and authority, have also been remarkably successful in persuading aspiring scientists to renounce moral autonomy and therewith the capacity to make judgments or to pursue ends that are socially or cognitively disruptive of the disciplinary community. (Forman, 1991, p. 75)

The authority of science was inseparably linked to the prospect of personal transcendence that it offered, which was grand enough 'to lift from the individual the burden of personal moral autonomy and to compensate for the circumstance that the scientist "must sacrifice his individuality for his field"' (Forman, 1991, p. 75). However, the general decline of the prestige enjoyed by science put an end to this state of affairs and the historians of science could renounce transcendence and the subservient role sanctioned by it. Hence, Forman continues, there is now both the room and the necessity for the critical stance which has traditionally been accepted in the historiography of philosophy and the arts. As an independent critic, the historian of these fields has a role 'in determining what is and what is not a significant contribution' (Forman, 1991, p. 77) and such a role requires a morally informed perspective. Only historians of science have remained passive in this respect, awed as they were by the moral and intellectual authority exercised by the natural sciences. Now, however, since all this has changed, two basic moral judgements are possible: 'celebration and criticism' (Forman, 1991, p. 82).

Danziger makes much of Forman's celebration concept. In his view, those who take this moral judgement as their point of departure are condemned to the conventional wisdom of the present as the norm for judging the past, and whatever is discovered in this way will implicitly be a celebration of the present. Such a 'feel good history [is a] service which disciplinary history renders to the discipline and which keep[s] it alive in spite of its ultimate irrelevance to the central scientific tasks of the discipline' (p. 469). The professional historian, on the other hand, is not morally committed to the discipline she studies. She is therefore free to choose her own criteria of historical significance, which may well be different from those of the scientists. And this, Danziger correctly infers, 'means a parting of the way between the scientist and the critical historian of science' (p. 470; cf. Rappard, 1995). Drawing on Forman (1991), Danziger continues,

... the former takes science as the primary referent and thus enslaves himself to the moral authority of the discipline to produce history in celebration of that discipline. Critical historians, however, refuse to do this and thereby place themselves morally outside the pale as far as the disciplinary community is concerned. (p. 470)

Using forceful strokes and restricting himself to black and white, Danziger certainly produced an enticing sketch of the two historical sensibilities. It is therefore easily overlooked that whatever perspective one takes, the history of science cannot but be irrelevant to science: if pursued from the celebratory insider stance, it is, as Danziger observed, irrelevant to its central tasks, whereas the critical outsider pays the price of isolation from the scientific community, whose members will not bother to listen to her. A gloomy picture indeed of the future of the history of psychology!

At this point, the psychologist-historian in need of consolation should know that Forman's celebratory stance is geared to the natural sciences; psychology is nowhere mentioned. In what respect could the absence of psychology be relevant in the context of this comment?

It was argued earlier that at the foundational level essential differences can be seen to exist between psychology and the natural sciences. Many of these differences can be found in Danziger's paper: the field is characterized by deep divisions between alternative schools so that a general working consensus is nowhere to be found (p. 471). Perennial ambiguities can be found about psychology's status as a natural or a human science (p. 473) so that no one need be surprised about the proliferation of radical alternatives (p. 476) to this faddish (p. 481) endeavour. In view of this list, which could be extended almost endlessly if one turned to other historical and theoretical writings, the present author can't help but wonder: how could one celebrate psychology?

The early insider-historians of psychology, whose views on the question: 'Historical research—why?' are summarized by Wertheimer (1980), seemed not particularly inspired by celebratory feelings, and I doubt, apparently along with Danziger, if the overall achievements of the discipline over the past 20 years warrant a fundamental change of opinion in this respect. But even if this were different, it would not necessarily justify the view which Danziger and Forman seem to hold that insider history cannot be its very nature but celebratory.

Danziger observes correctly that in the natural sciences the professional outsider-history has become the norm. Nevertheless, different voices can also be heard in those quarters. Biologist-historian Ernst Mayr is not surprised that many scientists have taken an interest in the history of science but, he cautions, the interest of the scientist 'is quite specific and in many respects different from that of the historian trained in the humanities' (Mayr, 1990, p. 304). Concerning the history of science, technology and medicine, Pickstone (1995, p. 206) tends towards a similar view. Another example showing that even in the natural sciences the outsider perspective is not axiomatic is found in Swerdlov (1993). So, if it can be maintained that there is history *in* psychology as currently pursued—the same holds for economics (cf. Klant, 1987)—then my contention is that it would not do for the history of psychology to withdraw into the professional historian's isolation from science—an isolation, moreover, which is described by Forman as less than splendid. The critical historian, he says, 'must find an appetite for unhappiness, for the sadness of reality; must find gratification in standing in the world free of supporting ideologies, rather than, with the scientist, preferring fable to fact' (Forman, 1991, p. 82).

Towards the end of Danziger's essay an attempt is made to bridge the cleavage—so cheerfully accepted earlier—between the insider and outsider positions. The emergence of a critical historiography, Danziger observes, means 'the appearance of voices that are voices of outsiders from the point of view of the scientist insider, but that lay claim to the position of insiders by virtue of their disciplinary affiliation with psychology' (p. 479). These historians, in other words, manage to combine 'the insider's engagement with the discipline's concepts and practices with the moral distance maintained by the outsider' (p. 479). I have nothing to argue against critical history as such, but the problem is: how do these lines bear on the question as to which historiographical model is appropriate for psychology? It would be helpful to know just what 'moral distance' entails in terms of the conceptual framework that is

adopted to frame the research problems, and answers, of the historian of psychology: the framework of the insider-psychologist or the framework of the outsider-historian trained in a different field. In view of this question, it is to be noted that historians who take the basic moral judgement of criticism as their point of departure are, according to Forman (1991, p. 71), 'preoccupied with independence from the sciences'.

I doubt if independence is what psychology and its history need most. In my view the insider perspective may be painted in brighter colours than Danziger seems to have on his palette; hence, I see no reason for the history of psychology of the future to turn the insider out.

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